Haunted Time, Still Photography and Cinema as Memory: The Dream Sequence in Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives

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Abstract: In Southeast Asian cinemas and its theorizations, ghosts have come to occupy an important role as figurations of a precolonial or premodern age. As beings with temporalities „out of joint“, they blur the linearity of time and history and often appear as carriers of memory and trauma. Apichatpong Weerasethakul's film „Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives“ (TH 2009) deals with the traumatic past of the Thai Northeast. Focusing on an analysis of a dream sequence from the film, I will show how „Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives“ features various ghost and spirit characters that stem from a reimagination of the premodern and at the same time refer to modernist cinema – namely, the work of Michelangelo Antonioni and Chris Marker – and its critique of modernity's belief in the evident and veracious photographic image. From this interplay arises a nexus of meanings that is charged with a critique of the state politics of repression and image control.

Haunted Time, Still Photography and Cinema as Memory: The Dream Sequence in *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives*

鬼魅時代，靜物攝影與作為記憶的電影：論《波米叔叔的前世今生》中的夢境段落

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Introduction

After being awarded the 2010 *Palme d'Or* at Cannes for *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* (2009), Thai director Apichatpong Weerasethakul ended his acceptance speech by thanking "all the ghosts and spirits of Thailand, for without them, the film could not have been made."[1] While this quote refers to the extremely lively and well-populated body of Thai ghost lore and to its animist roots, it also speaks of the ghost of Thai nationhood and the ways it haunts its citizens. In this way, the quote encompasses various levels of meaning we shall inquire into in the course of this essay.

Recent theory has pointed out how ghosts in cinema become signifiers of liminality and subalternity, and carriers of repressed memories. While examining *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* from this angle, I shall focus on the effects that the ghosts in the film have on its temporal structure. Through the analysis of a dream sequence that is key to the film, I will discuss how the ghostly out-of-jointedness of time that appears in the sequence not only expresses the voice of a marginalized region, but enables state critique, by creating a web of meanings spun from allusions to the political history of the region, as well as to present-day concerns, and additionally, to specifics of the cinematic media.

The film is set during the last days of Boonmee, an aging man who lives on a farm in the Thai northeast. Dying of kidney failure, he confronts his past as a soldier, a father and a husband. During this reliving of the past, he reencounters his long-lost son, who has become a monkey ghost, and his late wife, who returns as a translucent spirit and comforts him in his fear of dying. Additionally, the film is interspersed with scenes of a roaming buffalo that wanders into the jungle, as well as the story of a princess of a bygone era, who mourns her lost youth and mates with a catfish — beings that might be understood as Boonmee's previous lives. After Boonmee passes away in a jungle cave, the film continues, showing his funeral. After the ceremony, his relatives watch TV in a hotel room, accompanied by a monk who, after a while, gets up and leaves, while at the same time remaining seated, a duplication created by double exposure.

Critic Lawrence Chua calls the film "[…] a moving meditation on the instability of life forms, memory, and history;"[2] its strange, opaque twists in plot development create a nonlinear narration that prompts viewers into a trance-like state. Its storylines transcend the individual protagonist, instead evolving into a universal contemplation of the fleetingness of existence. Teeming with all kinds of spirits, ghosts, human-animal relations and hybrids, as well as near-death visions, an out-of-body-experience, and reincarnation, *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* focuses on

1 Apichatpong Weerasethakul, Acceptance Speech at Cannes 2010, accessed October 11, 2014, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CAgn-H_0Gjo.

2 Lawrence Chua, "Apichatpong Weerasethakul," in *Bomb Magazine*, accessed October 11, 2014, http://bombsite.com/issues/114/articles/4715.

transgressions between the living and the dead, blurring the borders between these realms. The film follows the theme of liminality and the ambiguity at the point of crossing a threshold that changes identity and dissolves order.

The Thai Northeast as a Site of Trauma

While the most obviously featured threshold is the one between life and death, the film also touches on a geopolitical threshold, a border zone. It is set in Isarn, the Thai Northeast that expands towards the Mekong river and the Thai-Lao border.

This region has a complex history in terms of nationhood. The border to Laos was established definitely only at the beginning of the 20th century, during the colonial era of French Indochina; before this demarcation, the borderline was not mapped out and thus much more fluid, allowing for lively economic and cultural exchange.[3] After the official demarcation, the region was annexed as Siamese territory, and its inhabitants were newly identified as Siamese, regardless of their ethnic or regional background. The process of incorporating Isarn into the nation-state continued throughout the twentieth century. It encompassed state-led campaigns for 'Thaification', omitting the Lao origins of the region.[4] At the same time, the region remained economically and infrastructurally neglected by the central powers, and its inhabitants were marginalized and discriminated.[5]

Due to its remoteness and its closeness to the nation's borders, the North-East was seen as a critical region in terms of opposition to the centralized powers.[6] During the Cold War, Isarn was perceived as a breeding ground for communism by the government. It served as a hiding place for members of the Communist Party who fled from state repression to the North-Eastern jungles, and became the scene of left-wing guerilla movements and communist insurgence.[7]

In the official discourse of Thai state authorities, communism is perceived as a major enemy of the state and is thus situated as belonging to the other, the external, as ultimate Non-nation. Externalness in this sense is not geographical, but ideological and cultural. As Thongchai Winichakul points out, the significance of the Thai border, in this sense, grows from a demarcation line to a symbol of separation between a constructed we-self and otherness, a system of binary oppositions based on a dichotomy of internal and external boundaries.[8] Regarding communism in Isarn, the "external" threat was, in fact, perceived as internal and the region as a potentially dangerous place for

3 Thongchai Winichakul, *Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994), 165.

4 Christopher John Baker and Pasuk Phongpaichit, *A History of Thailand* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 172.

5 Winichakul, *Siam Mapped*, 165.

6 Baker and Phongpaichit, *A History of Thailand*, 173.

7 Ibid., 183.

8 Winichakul, *Siam Mapped*, 164-9.

the nation's unity. The Border Patrol police and the army oppressed local communities, suspecting them of sympathising with communism. This oppression took the shape of brutal repression, torture and executions.[9] The violence of this era remains traumatic and is not communicated as official, state-sanctioned history until the present day, but lingers as nonofficial history, silenced due to its criticism of the state.

The troubled past of Isarn forms an underlying theme of *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives.* Subtle references to regional idiosyncrasies appear throughout: a group of Lao migrant workers on Boonmee's farm jokingly speak French, prompting him to mimic them; his sister informs him that the local idiom is in fact not a Thai dialect, but Lao; later, they discuss the distance of Isarn from central Thailand (that is commonly considered the nation's heartland). More direct references are also made as Boonmee mentions his past in the army, killing communists, and ponders the consequences for his karma.

As essentially liminal beings, the ghosts and spirits surrounding Boonmee figuratively express the border status of this region haunted by its past.[10] In the following, we shall see that they also express its subalternity and critique the state's policies regarding Isarn.

Ghosts as Figurations of Subalternity

In current cinema and theory, ghosts increasingly appear not solely as literal beings, but in a symbolic, figurative way. Derrida has famously spoken of Haunting as characteristic of the postmodern age, reflecting its discontent with the notion of a linear progress of history and its concerns with teleology, as well as its proclamations of the end of history.[11] In postcolonial cultures, ghosts often appear as the haunting memory of the colonial era and of the colonized, marking the era of the present day.[12] In this context, the spectral is frequently employed as a symbol to express the voice of the subaltern, enabling it to be heard, or even to take revenge and thus to restore justice.[13]

While the ghosts in *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* refer in part to elements from popular culture — for example in the case of the monkey ghost who is reminiscent of Thai

9 Baker and Phongpaichit, *A History of Thailand*, 184.

10 On the jungle as another figuration of the border and the liminal in Apichatpong's work, see Natalie Boehler, "The Jungle as Borderzone: The Aesthetics of Nature in the Work of Apichatpong Weerasethakul," in *Austrian Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 4.2 (2011): 290-304. On the Mekong as haunted border in Apichatpong's *Mekong Hotel* (2012), see Natalie Boehler, "Staging the Spectral: The Border, Haunting, and Politics in *Mekong Hotel*," in *Horror Studies,* Special Issue: Thai Horror, 2014 (forthcoming)

11 Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

12 Benedict Richard and O'Gorman Anderson, *The Spectre of Comparisons: Nationalism, Southeast Asia, and the World* (London: Verso, 1998).

13 Bliss Cua Lim, *Translating Time: Cinema, the Fantastic, and Temporal Critique* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009).

horror films of the 60s — they also introduce elements of a reimagined premodernity into the narrative, as they echo the spirit beliefs and ghost lore of the region. This is the case in Boonmee's dead wife who reappears, or in Boonmee's past incarnations that he revisits during the course of the film. These beliefs feed from animism, commonly seen as a lower, primitive form of belief when compared to Buddhism, the official state religion, and thus often regarded as nonofficial, nonmodern and provincialist, practiced especially in remote rural regions, especially the Northeast.[14] Linked to Isarn as a remote, rural region located far from Bangkok, the modern, progressive core of the nation and seat of state power, the world of some of Boonmee's ghosts refers to an age before the formation of the modern nation-state and echoes the voices of the subaltern, marginalized by the central powers of the state.

However, this is clearly not a pure, naive take on premodernity, but a reimagining of it that often happens in a playful way, such as in the scene where the princess, one of Boonmee's past lives, mates with a catfish. Another example might be a dinner scene in which Boonmee's wife reappears alongside his son-turned-monkey ghost: this scene melds several kinds of spectral imaginings — animist ones and local 60s B-horror — and thus playfully creates a modern-day pastiche.

According to Chris Berry and Mary Farquhar, ghosts signify an explosion of linear time; they are "a blast not only from the past, but also the future," haunting the present from two temporal directions simultaneously.[15] As beings that revisit from bygone eras and at the same time open up questions about the future, they destabilize the otherwise clearly demarcated present and confuse our temporal orientation. This "haunted time" implicitly critiques modern notions of history as progress and modernity's ideal of moving forward. The destabilization of linear temporality calls into question how history and historicity are experienced, and thus touches upon our relationship with the past and future, with memory and utopia. As visitors from the past, Boonmee's ghosts are carriers of the Northeast's traumatic past. The state critique they transport extends into the present and future through the out-of-joint time they create.

Haunted Cinematic Time in the Dream Sequence

Haunted time becomes especially acute in a dream sequence toward the end of the film. Just before his death, Boonmee's voice-over recalls:

> Last night, I dreamt of the future. I arrived there in a sort of time machine. An authority capable of making anybody disappear ruled the future city. When the authorities found "past people," they shone a light on them. The light projected images from their past onto a screen until their arrival in the future. Once these images appeared, these "past people" disappeared. I was afraid

14 Baker and Phongpaichit, *A History of Thailand*, 172.

15 Chris Berry and Mary Ann Farquhar, *China on Screen: Cinema and Nation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006): 39.

> of being captured by the authorities because I had many friends in this future. I ran away. But wherever I ran, they still found me. They asked me if I knew this road or that road. I told them I didn't know. And then I disappeared.

The words are combined with still images of youngsters in military clothes, posing for pictures amidst the rural Isarn landscape, and holding a monkey ghost captive. The sequence forms an insert that falls out of the film's narrative, being much less linear than the rest. It is narrated by the disembodied voice of the dying protagonist, a liminal, near-ghostly voice that echoes the disruptions that the future dystopia of the dream entails. The final line of the monologue, "and then I disappeared", is edited to an image of an empty country dirt road showing circular tire traces: a deserted landscape from which humans have vanished, leaving behind traces of their movement (see image 1). Boonmee's voice seems to echo in this empty space, lingering in it after his physical presence has left.

The dream sequence confuses temporal planes: it tells of a memory of a past dream; this dream, however, is set in the future. While some images, especially those of young men in army attire, recall the military presence and communist insurgence during the postwar era, the image of stone-throwing youths (see image 2) calls to mind more recent political contexts, namely the Bangkok street riots of 2010, when political unrest culminated in mass protests and in open violence carried out by armed forces. This connotation is further deepened by the fact that rural masses from upcountry regions, especially the Northeast, made up a large part of the followers of the UDD (United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship), more widely known as Thailand's Red Shirts, during the upheavals of 2010.

Image 1: Still from *Uncle Boonmee*: tire tracks

Image 2: Still from *Uncle Boonmee*: young men throwing rocks

Another critique appears in this sequence: the image of the projection of people's pasts onto a public screen, that leads to the disappearance of these people, calls to mind the strict Thai censorship system. The state control of public images prohibits criticism of the authorities and presents a major impediment to the work of Thai filmmakers. It was publicly criticized by activists from the Thai film scene in 2009, but to no avail; censorship laws have since then been tightened. Apichatpong has played a major part in this movement after his previous film *Syndromes and a Century* (TH 2006) was banned from Thai cinemas in 2007.[16] The future dystopia is, then, a commentary of the state's authoritarian control of public imagery.

The dream sequence uses a ghostly voice and haunted time to speak about injustices of the past and of the present day, establishing connections between both, as it suggests that state violence continues to haunt the region and thus the nation's ethnic, social and political minorities, and that this oppressive authoritarian rule will carry on into the future.

Haunted time occurs on the level of narration as well. The still images interrupt the narrative flow, as well as the flow of cinematic time. Instead of moving images — one of the essential

16 May Adadol Ingawanij, "Disreputable Behaviour: The Hidden Politics of the Thai Film Act," *Vertigo* 3.8 (Winter 2008), accessed December 15, 2014, http://www.closeupfilmcentre.com/vertigo_magazine/volume-3-issue-8-winter-2008/disreputable-behaviour-the-hidden-politics-of-the-thai-film-act/.

characteristics of cinema — we watch stills that each freeze a single moment in time. This shatters the illusion of cinematic continuity in the present tense, of time as we experience it in our perceived reality: while the moving image mimics our everyday experience of time, the single still image is unquestionably marked as past. Roland Barthes has described being photographed with becoming objectified and likened this to the experience of death, of "becoming a ghost"[17]: still images make the passing of time evident and, in this way, implicitly broach the issue of death. As Jean Ma has pointed out, there is a ghostly quality inherent in the medium of film as well: "If photography offers its viewer a visual presence that is haunted by the absence of a future death, so too cinema's lifelike plenitude is haunted by a more literal absence — that of the image itself, constantly and intermittently disappearing from the screen as the film winds its way through the projector."[18]

By showing freeze frames, then, the film refers to the invisible fact that it is always actually made up of still images, and points toward its own inherent "ghostliness" that usually remains hidden by the film's illusory flow of images that simulates real-life human perception. Being dream images of a future, the sequence in *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* declares this future as already determined by haunting by employing the "ghostly" characteristics of the media.

The use of still images in the dream sequence calls to mind an earlier moment in the film when Boonsong, Boonmee's son-turned-monkey ghost, recalls the story of his transformation. Having taken up photography, he becomes fascinated with it and, one day, when enlarging a picture, discovers a monkey ghost coincidentally photographed. This leads him to venture into the jungle and eventually leave home, becoming a monkey ghost himself. By introducing the medium of photography and reflecting on its characteristics, the film refers to it as a medial predecessor, and to an earlier era of image production. In *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives*, photography is linked to the world of the supernatural, rendering the monkey ghost and Boonmee's dreams visible.

As Tom Gunning has pointed out, the fascination of early cinema with the uncanny and the supernatural can be traced back to the genre of spirit photography, and owes much to the trick techniques, the effect of evidence, and the mechanical reproduction made possible by these new media.[19] In this era, the visualization of ghosts by photography and film conjured a pre-modern, supernatural world, while at the same time embracing the full technological potential of early modernity's media. As *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* connects photographic image-making to the supernatural, it remembers the early days of the media and re-imagines a kind of primitive cinema.

The "past-ness" of the still images in the dream sequence also refers to the history of the film's

17 Roland Barthes, *La chambre claire: note sur la photographie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1980): 22.

18 Jean Ma, "Photography's Absent Times", in *Still Moving. Between Cinema and Photography*, eds., Karen Beckman and Jean Ma (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2008): 98-118.

19 Tom Gunning, "Phantom Images and Modern Manifestations: Spirit Photography, Magic Theater, Trick Films, and Photography's Uncanny," in Patrice Petro, *Fugitive Images. From Photography to Video* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995): 42-71.

making. They were taken during a larger project of Apichatpong's that *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* is a part of. This project, entitled *Primitive*, consists of short films, installations, and a graphic arts novel and is set in Nabua, a village in Isarn, where torturings and mass executions took place during the cold-war hunt for communists and the male population was nearly eradicated.[20] The images, then, carry the director's memory of a previous project, referring to the story of the film's creation.

The use of still images is a comment on the significance of image production for the construction and conservation of memory. Images add to our collective visual archive and freeze the present for future reference; the absence, or, in situations with tightened rules such as present-day Thailand, the eradication of certain kinds of visual imagery, then, causes the disappearance of certain memories, or prevents them from forming in the first place. Instead, they linger as unspoken, unofficial, traumatic history.

Cinema as Memory and Critical Modernity: Nods to Antonioni and Marker

Besides mixing various temporal planes of narration as well as the temporalities inherent in the media of photography and film, *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* also combines references to various eras of film history. While some scenes, such as the dinner scene where the ghosts of Boonmee's wife and son appear, mimic the style of classical Thai cinema of the 1950s and 1960s, others, such as the long takes of Boonmee's orchard, are based on European auteur cinema. By merging disparate styles, the film taps into collective memories of cinematic images and becomes a hommage to the history of cinema; moreover, it reflects on circumstances of image production that vary over time and geopolitical space, drawing parallels between loci and continuations of discourses, as the following examples show.

The dream sequence contains obvious references to Michelangelo Antonioni's *Blow-Up* (I/USA/UK 1966). A shot in the dream sequence of a young man kneeling above another, lying on the ground, and taking photos of him (see image 3) mirrors an iconic scene from *Blow-Up,* in which a photographer clicks away at a female model lying stretched out under him, and thus queers the famous image (see image 4).

Blow-Up is quoted earlier in the film as well, in the scene mentioned above in which Boonmee's son enlarges a photo and discovers a monkey ghost. The protagonist of *Blow-Up* is a photographer who, unknowingly, takes what might be a picture of a crime. While enlarging it, he discovers telling details that lead him to believe he has uncovered a murder. As in *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives*, the captivating detail is embedded in a scene of nature; as the monkey-ghost on the

20 Apichatpong Weerasethakul, "Primitive: Introduction," accessed December 15, 2014, http://www.kickthemachine.com/page80/page22/page13/page62/index.html; Aparna Sharma, "Apichatpong Weerasethakul: Primitive (review)," *Leonardo* 45.2 (2012): 167-9.

Image 3: photo scene in *Uncle Boonmee* that mimics *Blow-Up*

Image 4: scene from *Blow-Up*

enlarged photograph appears amidst dense jungle, the crime scene emerges in an English park.[21] *Blow-Up*, too, is a film that is centered on the topic of image production, reflecting on how images can convey, construct, or mislead memory, and thus help or deceive us in the search for ontological evidence.

As Laura Rascaroli points out, *Blow-Up* employs the theme of photography and specific photographic aesthetics to critique the official state discourse on "Swinging London" that, in the 1960s, propagated London as a young and hip city in which individualism replaces the privileges of old social classes. This critique is echoed in *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* by a sharp critiquing of the official, state-sanctioned version of modern Thai nationhood, its homogenization of the Thai citizens and, especially, its marginalization of decentralized regions.[22]

Even more obviously, the sequence refers to Chris Marker's well-known science fiction dystopia *La jetée* (F 1962). This film, too, is constructed almost entirely of still images, and is a tale of time travel. After a nuclear war that has happened sometime in the not-too-distant future, an underground survivor in the destroyed city of Paris is captured by state authorities who use him in an experiment in time travel, because he is haunted by an image of his childhood. He is sent back to his own past. There, he understands that the image from the past that haunted him was in fact the image of his own death that he witnessed as a boy. *La jetée* creates the temporal structure of a time loop; in this way, it, too, confuses temporal and narrative linearity. Similar to the sequence in *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives,* it intertwines and confuses the past and the future, speaking of traumatic memory and of problematic image production, and situating these topics in a totalitarian end time.

La jetée lets its viewers revisit alleged memories of the post-World War III future: it features images of a bombed Paris and of cruel government functionaries, captured in grainy black-and-white still images (see image 5). Their aesthetics lend the fictitious memories a distinct documentary feel, while the fact that they consist of stills evokes a pastness of the images, as in the dream sequence. Here, too, we find an acute awareness of the modern correlation between photographs and memories. At the same time, both films comment on the questionable status of photographic images as reliable carriers of memory, suggesting that image media have an inherent memory of their own, "as if our subjective histories were thus determined by the memory-life of the image itself, carrying and expressing history."[23]

Poignantly, both *Blow-Up* and *La jetée* are, themselves, historic. As films of the past, they shape a part of the memory of cinema. By integrating nods to these modernist works into the

21 On the role of domesticated vs. wild nature as setting in these two scenes, see Laura Rascaroli, "La sostenibilità del cinema d'autore: a proposito di *Blow Up* e *Lo zio Boonmee che si ricorda le vite precedenti*," *Annali online lettere Ferrara. Rivista di Linguistica Letteratura Teatro Cinema Arte,* http://annali.unife.it/lettere/ (forthcoming).

22 Ibid.

23 Patrick Ffrench, "The Memory of the Image in Chris Marker's *La Jetée*," *French Studies* 59.1 (January 1, 2005): 31-7 (doi:10.1093/fs/kni066).

dream sequence, *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* acknowledges the "memory-life" of the works it relates to from a postmodern point of view. These quotes thus transcend cinematic eclecticism and point toward traces of film history in present-day cinema. The dream sequence melds still photography with 1960s European auteur films. Both cinematic veins strongly question the image, still as well as moving, its ability to carry memory, and its veracity, by leaning towards its uncanny, phantasmatic aspects and its ability to show the invisible and confuse our sensory perception. Implicitly, this questioning critiques modernity's assumption of photography's veracity that gives all photographs authority.[24]

Conclusion

As the dream sequence blurs the temporal planes of the film's storyline, it imbues it with a haunted temporality. The film's images and narration become ghostlike, transgressing temporal linearity. This haunting quality carries the subtle political voice of the film: by breaking the film's flow, the sequence creates gaps in the narrative that suggest the fragility of memory and the haunting of trauma via a destabilized narrative and cinematic gaze.

Its ghostly floating between the ages undermines the present-day narrative by echoing memories that disturb and disrupt its straightforwardness. At once memories of the cold-war communist oppression in Isarn and future memories of the 2010 oppression of anti-government street rallies in Bangkok, the dream images suggest a lineage of violent state oppression of government criticism, often directed against the masses of the marginalized rural population. It also envisions a continuation of authoritative rule, suggesting a rather bleak view of the future. The implicit linkage that the film creates between the cold war past, 2010, and the future is, of course, especially poignant when stated in a time of political turmoil in Thailand, as the clashes between the government and the population grow more serious, and as the rift between conservative Royalists and populist parties deepens, forming a crucial point of passage in the process of democratization and prompting the search for adequate forms of government.

Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives articulates its political critique via a reimagining of the premodern. By connecting ghost and spirit figures of various sources, animist beliefs, and the uncanny dimension of early photography and film, the film (sometimes ironically) reenacts tropes that date back to an age before the founding of the modern Thai nation-state.[25] At the same time, the film draws from other visions of the future belonging to films of the past, by quoting the work of Marker and Antonioni, and by establishing parallels to their films, in terms of questioning

24 Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Picador, 2001): 6ff.

25 The onset of modernity in Siam/Thailand is commonly seen as a process that took place from ca. 1800 onwards, encompassing state reforms, the modernization of social and cultural structures, and finally the abolishment of absolutist monarchy in 1932. This time period roughly coincides with the development and spread of photographic technologies.

Image 5: The future vision of a war-torn Paris in *La jetée*

the photographic image and the image as carrier of memory as veracious. Instead, Apichatpong's film aligns itself with earlier films that characterize the photographic image — and thereby their own images — as phantoms. These hauntings from film history, as well as those from pre-national Thailand, are combined in a postmodern stance that plays with a simultaneousness of various ages, in order to question the state of the nation, and of image-making, in the present day. ※